Freedom Watch

ELECTION EVENTS

October 3
VOTER MOBILIZATION TRAINING
5:30pm at Gay and Lesbian Fund Center
Sponsored by CP and
presented by the White House Project.

October 7
RALLY FOR ALL FAMILIES
2pm at America the Beautiful Park
Put on by Pikes
Peak Equality Coalition (PPEC)

October 10
LOCAL BALLOT INITIATIVE FORUM
5:30pm at Carnegie Library
Sponsored by CP and the Independent

October 12
The FW Candidate Survey comes out.

October 16
SEC. OF STATE AND ATTNY. GEN. DEBATE
Time & location TBA
Sponsored by CP, El Pomar
and the Independent.

October 17
STATEWIDE BALLOT INITIATIVE FORUM
7pm at Carnegie Library
Sponsored by CP, League of Women
Voters and the Independent

For more information call 520-9899

Verifying the Facts:

A detailed look at James Dobson's argument against same-sex marriage

By Erin Bennett

Like many US citizens, I want to be fully informed for the upcoming campaign season and this November's election. This led me to an article by Dr. James Dobson (founder of Focus on the Family) entitled "Eleven Arguments Against Same-Sex Marriage" (http://www.family.org/cforum/extras/a0032427.cfm). Since I am in favor of same-sex marriage, this article intrigued me.

I analyzed Dobson's arguments in light of the research he used (and refused to use) and observed that his arguments against same-sex marriage have no support. Dobson's main claim that I contest is that same-sex marriage will destroy the traditional family.

What exactly is it about same-sex couples that frightens and threatens Dobson? After I thoroughly read through his article, I was overwhelmed with a plethora of emotions: anger, depression, frustration, confusion; the list goes on. Confusion, however, was the strongest of my immediate feelings. I didn't know where Dobson was getting the research upon which he based his arguments, and I didn't understand how he made the interpretations and claims that he did.

Dobson claims that the traditional family is rapidly disintegrating due to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) community. This assertion is puzzling to me. Focus on the Family's website states that "homosexuals make up less than 3 percent of the population" and that a person doesn't have to be gay, since it is a choice (http://www.family.org/married/topics/a0025114.cfm). He believes that any GLBT person can change to be heterosexual if they so desire. This raises an interesting conundrum: If the GLBT community is less than 3 percent of the population, then how can that

See **Verifying the Facts** page **3**

Clouds in Their Coffee

How Colorado voters could stop lobbyist influence from being measured out in coffee cups, event tickets, trips, and other freebies ...

By Christopher Thomas

The group Coloradans for Clean Government thinks that lobbyist gift-giving may be clouding the minds of public officials.

In a recent report called "Gift-Giving in Colorado Politics: The Need for Ethical Reform in Colorado's Political Process," the six-member committee sifted through the disclosure statements of Colorado's Governor and General Assembly members to compile gift-giving totals. For 2005—the most recent year with complete data available—here's what they found:

Colorado's 65 Representatives in the General Assembly reported receiving $102,333 in gifts, an average of $1,570 per Representative.

Colorado's 35 Senators reported receiving $41,102 in gifts, more than $1,170 per Senator.

Governor Bill Owens alone received $57,102 in gifts.

And the gift-giving didn't boil down to just free cups of coffee. Reported gifts in 2005 included an IBM Pocket PC, a football autographed by Jerome Bettis, and 32 golf trips, as well as tickets to Broncos, Avalanche, Nuggets, and Rockies games.

Even if a direct quid pro quo relationship between gifts and votes can't be demonstrated, Coloradans for Clean Government is concerned that unregulated gift-giving by professional lobbyists creates the appearance that regular Colorado citizens—who can't afford to pay such lavish attention to their elected officials—aren't getting a fair shake.

The recently released report was compiled in support of the group's statewide ballot initiative called "Ethics in Government" or Amendment 41. The initiative garnered more than 110,000 signatures, and on August 14th the Colorado Secretary of State's office certified the initiative with 120% of the required signatures.

If passed by voters in November, the initiative would amend the Colorado Constitution with language that would ban gifts—including meals and beverages—from lobbyists to public officials, and would limit gifts to public officials from all other sources to $50 per calendar year. The rules would apply not only to members of Colorado's General Assembly, but also to government employees and contractors and to employees at state universities.

There are several important exemptions, however. The language of the initiative does allow for public officials to receive gifts in excess of $50 from "a relative or personal friend of the recipient on a special occasion." And a lobbyist is not barred from giving gifts to a public official in the lobbyist's immediate family. The exemptions highlight that the goal of the initiative is to limit the possibility of achieving personal financial gain from the position of government office.

Another exemption allows state governments, local governments, and nonprofits receiving less than 5% of their funding from for-profit organizations to pay for "reasonable expenses" incurred by a public official as part of a convention, meeting, or fact-finding mission where the public official is speaking or participating in an official capacity.

Similar gift-ban bills have appeared before the Colorado legislature in recent years, but none have passed. That's why, this year, Coloradans for Clean Government decided to take the initiative directly to the voters.

Scandals such as those involving former lobbyist Jack Abramoff and former

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The 65% Solution?

By Sara Thomas

This November, two items on the ballot will directly affect school spending in Colorado. The first, Amendment 39, is part of a nationwide movement called the 65% Solution, led by Representative Joe Stengel and Michelle Austin, the Colorado representative of First Class Education. First Class Education is a nationwide organization whose ultimate mission is to require 65% of all school funding across the country to be spent in the classroom or when teachers and students are in direct contact. The second proposal, Referendum J, is a more relaxed version of Amendment 39 and is sponsored by Representative Mike Merrifield and Senator Sue Windels as an attempt to give more discretion to local schools.

The 65% Solution divides school funding into "in class" and "outside the classroom" categories developed by the National Center of Education Statistics, which classified education programs into these categories of instruction and support. These distinctions were created decades ago for an entirely unrelated purpose. The term "in class" refers to direct student-staff interaction, including teachers' salaries, instruction supplies, instruction aides, field trips, athletic equipment, coaches, music, arts, libraries, and librarians, all of which would be funded by 65% of the school's funds. "Outside the classroom" refers to school and district administration, maintenance, food services, transportation, teacher training and curriculum development, nurses, and guidance counselors, all of which would have to be funded by the remaining 35%. Currently, the national average of in-class spending is 61.3%. Colorado schools, on average, spend 57%. Amendment 39 is a proposed amendment to the state constitution, which would require the approval of a majority of Colorado voters. Once passed, the only option for reversal would be another amendment.

Referendum J is a revised version of Amendment 39, which attempts to alter the 65% Solution into a more manageable proposition by including teacher training, counselors, cafeterias, and school buses to the 65%. Should voters pass this referendum, the reversal option for this proposal is a majority vote from the state legislature.

35% Dilemma

Support for Amendment 39 began at the national level with an organization called First Class Education, founded by Patrick Byrne. Byrne, CEO of Overstock.com, is also well known for his significant financial support of school voucher programs and his public call for the eradication of the National Education Association. Locally, the bill is supported by Governor Owens, who was publicly recognized as the last signer of the petition to put the measure on the ballot.

First Class Education touts increasing classroom spending without increasing taxes. It claims that taking funding away from administrative offices and support programs and putting it into the classroom will leave enough money all around if schools learn how to efficiently spend funds. There are several problems with that theory. First, it fails to address the fact that not all schools can cover support-program needs with 35% of a total budget. Schools catering to low-income families may require specialized outside-of-classroom programs such as busing children to school or providing reduced-rate meals. Schools that have the funds to send students on field trips or build extensive gyms have the advantage because field trips and athletic equipment fit into the 65% while some basic student needs such as transportation and eating do not.

Another flaw in the argument in favor of Amendment 39 is inaccurate statistics. While First Class Education claims that schools spending 65% of their budget in the classroom have higher achievement rates, statistics locally and nationally prove otherwise. In Colorado, six of the 156 districts reporting spend 65% or more on "in classroom" expenses. Of those six districts, only three achieved above the state average proficiency rate of 80% (Bell Policy Center report, Aug. 10, 2006). On the other hand, 133 of the 150 school districts that spend less than 65% of their budget in the classroom had student proficiency rates of 80% or more (www.schoolmatters.com).

Conceding Control

Organizations whose primary purpose is to protect the integrity of public education, such as the National Education Association and the National PTA, have voiced strong opposition to 65% proposals saying, for instance, "[the 65% solution] is fatally flawed and will hinder, not help our nation's schools in accomplishing the goal of providing every child with a well-rounded, high-quality education." The 65% Solution requires the relinquishment of local control over schools, evidenced by the fact that, in Colorado, this amendment would require budget shifts in 167 out of 178 school districts. Priorities that individual schools and districts have deemed crucial may lose funding because of a nationwide, state supported mandate that all school districts behave in a similar fashion. In addition, this policy prioritizes athletic programs over guidance counselors and teacher trainings. It also excludes special services such as speech/language therapy, audiology, and gifted and talented programs in its allotment of 65%. The estimated cost to fulfill this proposal is $50,000 annually, which covers the cost of overseeing the financial shift and monitoring school compliance. Overall, Colorado schools would be shifting a total of $278 million dollars away from what First Class Education considers support programs. This would result in nearly all school districts being forced to eliminate counselors, school nurses, bus drivers and food-service workers.

Referendum J would require only three schools to shift their budget to fit into the requirements and those schools would transfer a total of $1 million dollars away from support programs. While some of the major concerns of Amendment 39 are eliminated in this referendum, the most important objection still remains: a state-mandated budget takes control away from local schools.

Since the Colorado constitution calls for local control of tax dollars spent in districts, there will be a constitutional challenge if either measure passes. For more information on the "No on 39" campaign, visit http://www.coexcellentschools.org/.

Clouds in Their Coffee

Continued from page 1

California Representative Randy "Duke" Cunningham have dominated national headlines, but Colorado has had its share of recent homegrown ethics scandals as well. Former Lakewood Representative Deanna Hanna was caught apparently soliciting money for votes and former House Minority Leader Joe Stengel was revealed to have apparently taken excessive legislative pay while on vacation.

Although neither of these locally prominent ethics scandals would fall within the purview of the proposed gift ban, a separate provision of the Ethics in Government initiative could change the way similar complaints are reported, investigated, and adjudicated in the future.

"What the recent scandals do is highlight the need for an independent ethics commission in Colorado," says Jenny Flanagan, Executive Director of Colorado Common Cause, a group supporting the initiative. Currently, Colorado does not have an independent commission to hear and evaluate ethics complaints. Instead, legislators must judge their own—creating at least the possibility that friendships, political bonds, or professional sympathy might soften enforcements.

The Ethics in Government initiative would create a five-member independent commission that would hear ethics complaints, have subpoena power for investigating those complaints, and have the authority to create its own rules and procedures. Perhaps more importantly, public officials would be able to proactively ask the independent ethics commission for advisory opinions on whether a particular activity might violate existing ethics laws.

In addition to the gift ban and the independent commission, the third major provision of the initiative would be to institute a two-year "cooling off period" prohibiting elected officials from becoming lobbyists immediately after leaving office. Without the mandatory waiting period, there exists at least the appearance that companies could promise lucrative lobbying jobs to well-connected public officials in exchange for favorable votes or consideration.

So far, there does not appear to be any formal opposition to the initiative. However, some people have individually spoken out against the gift-ban provision. Sen. Andy McElhany, R-Colorado Springs, was quoted in the August 3rd issue of the Gazette as saying: "My concern is that this would ban even a cup of coffee. The best way to discuss an issue is during a mealtime, lunch, coffee or whatever." In addition, former Republican State Representative-turned lobbyist, William Artist, is quoted in the August 31st issue of the Colorado Springs Independent as saying: "Anybody who that [sic] thinks that taking somebody to lunch or a ballgame or something like that curries some kind of vote favor is totally naive about the process."

Their point seems to be this: legislators heavily rely on industry lobbyists to provide sometimes highly technical input or even actual legislative language when formulating bills, and lobbyist gift-giving helps form the basis of these productive working relationships. It remains to be seen how that argument will go over with voters, many of whom may be shocked to learn that lobbyists play such an apparently critical role in law-making.

For an independent assessment of Colorado's ethics rules pertaining to lobbyists, as well as a comparison to other states' rules, please visit: www.publicintegrity.org

To read the ballot initiative language in full, or to read the report Gift-Giving in Colorado Politics, please visit: www.bangifts.org

Citizens Project

Verifying the Facts

Continued from page 1

tiny minority destroy the entire institution of family?

Focus on the Family and like-minded organizations throw around a certain term, "the gay agenda," quite often. This refers to the supposedly united mission of the GLBT community. Dobson describes this agenda in Eleven Arguments: "Most gays and lesbians do not want to marry each other. That would entangle them in all sorts of legal constraints. Who needs a lifetime commitment to one person? *The intention here is to create an entirely different legal structure.*"

"...in countries that recognize same-sex relationships in some legal form, the rate of heterosexual marriage actually *increased*, while divorce rates *decreased*."

Dobson uses a red herring to back up his claim about different structures, as he asserts that the gay and lesbian movement has quickly created new goal lines as soon as each old goal has been reached. To me, this sounds like an effective method for achieving equality. Make many small goals on the road to the larger goal of full equality. So, in this sense, Dobson is correct: new goal lines are created as old goals are reached. However, he gives no backing to his claim that the GLBT community wants to destroy marriage and create a new structure. If Dobson were correct that the "gay agenda" wants to destroy marriage, then it would be reflected in the objectives of organizations that advocate for gay rights, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC).

The HRC is the largest national gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender advocacy organization, and they support equal marriage rights. According to Dobson, the HRC would represent the "gay agenda," yet they are looking to destroy only discrimination, not the institution of marriage.

Dobson and others, including Fox Broadcasting's Bill O'Reilly (*The O'Reilly Factor*), discuss the idea of a slippery slope. Dobson believes that same-sex marriage will inevitably lead to polyamory (having more than one loving relationship at a time, with the consent of all partners involved), bestiality, and incestuous marriages. Dobson says, "Why will gay marriage set the table for [polyamory]? Because there is no place to stop once that Rubicon has been crossed." According to him, same-sex marriage will cause an unstable legal climate that will allow judges to possibly interpret marriage as any combination of people or animals. On his show, O'Reilly often uses instances of people marrying ducks and dolphins as evidence of the inevitable destruction of marriage. All of his examples, however, were specious — symbolic marriage ceremonies that do not affect legal marriage.

Dobson and O'Reilly give no viable evidence that this slippery slope will occur, and it certainly has not happened in other countries where same-sex marriage is legal. Dobson and O'Reilly are frightened that same-sex marriage is going to lead to every imaginable (and unimaginable) possibility of marriage, but no organization that advocates same-sex marriage has ever suggested that the ability to marry multiple people or their pets is any sort of goal. Allowing same-sex marriage will not change the number of adults permitted to marry each other and will not affect family restrictions, such as marrying one's brother. Marriage will simply become a legal union of two consenting adults.

Dobson sees marriage between one man and one woman as a requirement for family, and if marriage were to include any other possibility than one man and one woman, the entire notion of family would be destroyed. He is denying the status of family to countless single mothers, single fathers, grandparent-led families, non-blood-related families, and the 3.1 million people in the US living in same-sex relationships.

Giving marriage rights to same-sex couples may change the definition of marriage, but it will not destroy the family. Indeed, a same-sex couple is already considered a family in many places in the world, including our own country. What Dobson may not realize is that not all US citizens equate family only with heterosexual marriage as he does. According to the HRC's 2005-2006 State of the Workplace report, 51% of Fortune 500 companies offer domestic partnership health insurance benefits, and 86% include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policy. Corporations with some of the biggest influence in the US recognize the GLBT community as one that deserves full equality, including recognition as able to have a family.

The main research that Dobson uses to support his argument is from three Scandinavian countries — Sweden, Norway, and Denmark — and the Netherlands. He argues that increased extramarital cohabitation and short-term relationships have resulted from legal recognition of same-sex couples there, and Bill O'Reilly adds that births outside of marriage have also increased. Both of them have misinterpreted the statistics while not supporting their interpretations with any actual research. Contrary to Dobson and O'Reilly's claims, births and heterosexual marriages have not been negatively influenced by same-sex marriage.

William Eskridge and Darren Spedale, authors of Gay Marriage: For Better or for Worse? What We've Learned from the Evidence, cite statistics which "found that in countries that recognize same-sex relationships in some legal form, the rate of heterosexual marriage actually *increased*, while divorce rates *decreased*" (http://mediamatters.org/items/printable/200606080003). Eskridge and Spedale looked at Scandinavia and the Netherlands years before same-sex couples were legally recognized. In most of those countries, since the 1970s, the marriage rate had been decreasing and divorce and extramarital births had both been increasing.

Once same-sex couples were recognized, however, these trends either leveled out or changed positively. For instance, in Denmark, after same-sex unions became legal in 1989, the rate of extramarital births lowered so that it is currently lower than it was in 1989. "In Sweden, the rate of marriage had been plummeting before 1994, when they adopted same-sex unions. The rate of [heterosexual] marriage has been increasing in Sweden since 1994" (http://mediamatters.org/items/printable/200606080003). Parenthood within marriage is still the norm in these countries, and cohabitating couples usually marry after they start having children.

Contrary to Dobson's position, Scandinavia and the Netherlands have shown us, as Eskridge and Spedale prove in their book, that same-sex marriage certainly does not have a negative effect on the traditional family and the institution of heterosexual marriage. If anything, it has had a positive effect in those countries.

Dobson says that children will suffer the most in any destruction of the traditional family. He says, "more than ten thousand studies have concluded that kids do best when they are raised by loving and committed mothers and fathers." He says that children raised by a married mother and father will be healthier, both mentally and physically. He fails to detail which studies he uses for these claims, and he seems to refute the most prominent research in our country. Both the American Psychological Association (which began researching same-sex parenting in the early 1970s) and the American Academy of Pediatrics have publicly said that the sexual orientation of parents does not have an influence on children's well-being and that children raised by GLBT parents are no worse off, mentally or physically, than those raised by heterosexual parents.

Dobson says he worries about the children of same-sex couples if the couples break up. According to the HRC, between 1 and 9 million children are being raised by same-sex couples in the US; one-third of lesbian couples and one-fifth of gay male couples are raising children. If Dobson truly cared about the welfare of these children, wouldn't he want the parents to be legally responsible and able to provide for their children properly? Without the rights and responsibilities of marriage, same-sex couples cannot suitably provide for their children, especially in terms of health care, and have no responsibility in the case of a break-up. If he really cared about the children, wouldn't Dobson allow same-sex couples to marry so that they would be responsible for their children?

Dobson fears that other nations are watching us, to then follow our lead in granting (or not granting) rights to same-sex couples. He thinks that marriage in the GLBT community will spread throughout the world if the US allows it. Maybe he hasn't paid attention to world affairs lately, but many developed nations in the world already have legal recognition of same-sex couples, including Canada, Argentina, New Zealand, South Africa, and 12 countries in Europe. The rest of the world has stopped looking to us for guidance in this department; we are quite behind in giving rights to our citizens, compared to the rest of the developed world. At this point, we should be the ones looking to other nations for leadership.

CP staff and volunteers supporting the GLBT Community at Pride Fest 2006.

James Dobson and Focus on the Family have millions of supporters worldwide, and Dobson's unproven argument against same-sex marriage is repeatedly delivered to those supporters. Ironically, Dobson has at least twice made public statements comparing his battle to ban same-sex marriage to the historic struggle to abolish slavery, which equates his fight *for* discrimination with our country's historic fight *against* discrimination. Hopefully, this sort of assertion would undermine his credibility even with his supporters. As long as Dobson's unconfirmed preachings continue to be seen as valid, much of the US will still believe that same-sex marriage destroys the traditional family and will continue to discriminate against the GLBT community.

Citizens Project

Intolerance, Extremism, Pursuit of Political Power Mark New Generation of Religious Right Leaders
Report Documents Rise of 'Patriot Pastors' Movement in Ohio and Other States

"I came to incite a riot! Man your battle stations! Ready your weapons! Lock and load!" Those incendiary words are the rallying cry of televangelist Rod Parsley, a leader of an increasingly prominent group of Religious Right activists known as the "Patriot Pastors" who are using their pulpits to advance far-right policies and politicians at the ballot box.

On August 16, 2006, People For the American Way Foundation, the NAACP, and the African American Ministers Leadership Council released a report, *The Patriot Pastors' Electoral War Against the 'Hordes of Hell'*, that documents how this new generation of Religious Right leaders is turning churches into political machines for far-right Republican candidates.

"The rise of the 'Patriot Pastors' is bad news for Americans who care about the health of our democracy" said PFAW Foundation President Ralph G. Neas. "Their harmful political agenda, their misuse of faith as a political weapon, and their absolute intolerance of disagreement are a poisonous combination."

The report documents that leaders of the Patriot Pastor movement use claims of anti-Christian persecution – political opponents are "the forces of darkness" and "the hordes of hell – to push a harmful mix of right-wing social, political and economic policies.

"The 'Patriot Pastors' aren't the first to use religion as a cover for policies that undermine opportunity and perpetuate injustice," said NAACP President and CEO Bruce S. Gordon. "They are the latest in a long line. We must match their zeal with our own faith in justice, our own commitment to progress."

The "Patriot Pastors" first mobilized in Ohio and Texas, where they already wield political influence—they played a significant role in Ohio gubernatorial candidate Ken Blackwell's primary victory, for example, and are a key part of his general election strategy—and they are now spreading their organizing techniques to other states, including Pennsylvania, Florida and Missouri.

Many religious leaders reject the Patriot Pastors' political agenda, as well their hostility to separation of church and state.

"Martin Luther King used the prophetic voice of the black church to rally people of all faiths in the cause of humanity and social justice," said Rev. Timothy McDonald, founder of the African American Ministers Leadership Council. "The Patriot Pastors wield religion as a divisive political weapon in the cause of a reactionary social and economic agenda."

The "Patriot Pastors" are a political force that should be on the radar screen of anyone who wants to understand the Religious Right and its effect on electoral politics. The new report on the "Patriot Pastors" is available at www.pfaw.org/go/patriotpastors.

Who is Simply Divine?

Call for Nominations

Tell us who you think deserves the Third Annual Citizens Project Divine Award!

This prestigious award is given annually to a person in the Pikes Peak region who has worked tirelessly to create a vibrant democracy in which equal rights are protected, individual freedoms are secure, differences are respected and people fully participate in civic life.

Citizens Project is inviting residents to send in nominations. Tell us in 300 words or fewer why your nominee has demonstrated through leadership, action and attitude that he or she embodies the Citizens Project ideals of "Celebrate Diversity" and "Create Community." Please provide specific information about your nominee's roles in the community – both officially and informally – and how you believe your nominee has made a lasting impact on the community. Deadline for submission is October 27. Please include your name and daytime phone number with your nomination. Email nominations to info@CitizensProject.org.

Final selection will be made by the Citizens Project board of directors. The Divine Award recipient will be honored in early 2007.

★RALLY★ FOR ALL FAMILIES

Saturday, October 7th
2:00 – 5:00 PM

America the Beautiful Park
(Rain or Shine)
Off the Colorado Ave. Bridge

VOTE!
Yes on Referendum I
No on Amendment 43

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"Citizens Project gives the public an opportunity to report injustice, to be listened to, and then to be part of the solution."

– Sharon Berthrong, CP board member

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Citizens Project

MISSION:

Citizens Project spotlights issues in the Pikes Peak region and mobilizes people to strengthen the traditional values of our nation: equal rights, individual freedoms, separation of church and state, civic engagement, and respect for diversity.

Citizens Project

P.O. Box 2085
Colorado Springs,
Colorado 80901
Phone: (719) 520-9899
Fax: (719) 520-0118
www.citizensproject.org
email: info@citizensproject.org

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